

NARRATOR: Crosby, H. Gene

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: December 14, 2000

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Crosby offered some names to the interviewer about other possible narrators. Reeves then gave the tape's introduction.
025	Crosby gave a brief biography of his life, including growing up in Oklahoma, serving a tour in the Army, and earning degrees at Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State University). He also mentioned various jobs he worked throughout his life.
080	People in college told Crosby about smokejumping. Crosby worked in northern Idaho before becoming a smokejumper on a Blister Rust program. During that summer he saw smokejumpers jump on fires in northern Idaho. He spoke with them, and their conversations helped him decide to be a smokejumper.
115	The way the food was prepared in McCall initially did not appeal to Crosby. He explained why he did not like the types of meals they ate. He learned to enjoy the food in the kitchen at the McCall camp.
155	He rode a bus from Oklahoma to Las Vegas to Boise to McCall. He talked about the sights he saw on the bus ride. The mountains in the U.S. West were a stark difference from the plains in Oklahoma. He also mentioned his thoughts about McCall when he arrived.
195	The physical training to be a smokejumper challenged Crosby. He said it took him a few weeks to adjust to the altitude. He also offered his opinions about the differences between Army training and smokejumping training. During his airborne training, they jumped at night. He offered his opinions about jumping in the dark.
245	Crosby did not recall any rites of passages, initiation, or hazing during his first year as a smokejumper. He talked about how veteran smokejumpers educated him about beer. Crosby detailed what he and his fellow rookie smokejumpers did the night before their first jump.
280	Crosby's first fire jump was on a small fire, and he thought it "was really nice." He mentioned that smokejumpers were well trained, so he felt competent to jump and land. Crosby said he had a heightened awareness

during his first jumps, but not really fear. He enjoyed leaving the airplane, and his only fear was with a tough landing area.

355 If there is not a good landing area, the spotter, according to Crosby, would call for a timber jump, which meant landing in a patch of trees. He only recalled one timber jump and one or two times getting caught in a tree. He continued to discuss landing, particularly during strong winds. He mentioned one specific fire near Ironside Mountain in eastern Oregon.

445 Crosby talked about fire control and general safety classes to help teach smokejumpers how to mentally fight fire. Crosby talked about two specific fires—Mann Gulch in 1949 and South Mountain or Storm King in 1994—where smokejumpers lost their lives, because of training issues.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Crosby discussed a book, written by John McLean, about the 1994 Storm King fire, that he learned about a book club discussion.

015 Veteran smokejumpers, according to Crosby, taught him about the fire and the terrain. Older guys looked out for the younger guys on the fire. He mentioned one specific fire, when Crosby as the veteran climbed a tall tree to rescue their equipment. He continued to talk about what he learned not only fighting fire but also doing non-fire projects.

055 Crosby described how smokejumpers talked about the Mann Gulch fire during his years as a smokejumper in the 1950s. He talked about how older Forest service veterans, in the 1950s, did not look kindly upon smokejumpers.

080 In regards to equipment, Crosby detailed the equipment smokejumpers carried on them as the jumped and the equipment that the spotter dropped to them on a fire. Crosby said that smokejumping bosses tried to keep the amount of equipment on the smokejumper as he jumped to a minimum. He discussed his own injuries and other jumpers' injuries while landing or fighting a fire.

120 Crosby felt the shovel, Pulaski, and crosscut saw were all important to fight a fire. During his time water pumps and radios were not used as often. He talked about his time in Silver City, New Mexico, and the number of jumps he made in a week.

150 Crosby talked about the early jump season in Silver City, New Mexico. He also described other states in the U.S. West where he jumped and other

Forest service personnel' attitudes towards smokejumpers. Crosby would fly his airplane to McCall and Missoula to train.

225 During one flight to Silver City, New Mexico, to visit some smokejumpers, Crosby and another smokejumper were struck by lightning in Crosby's plane.

255 With prompting from the interviewer, Crosby described more about the early smokejumping season in Silver City, New Mexico. He offered his opinions about Silver City, Bureau of Land Management smokejumpers, Alaska smokejumping, and jumping out of an airplane later in life.

310 Crosby explained why his time in Silver City, New Mexico, was some of the best years of his life. He enjoyed the people, the landscape, the food, the work, and the dances. He mentioned that jumping in New Mexico did not have many difference from jumping in Idaho. The Forest service bosses in New Mexico, according to Crosby, treated the jumpers well.

400 Smokejumpers worked on non-fire projects during non-busy times. Crosby explained what projects he worked on and where he wanted to work on those projects. He enjoyed working south of McCall, because it was warmer. With prompting from the narrator, Crosby described how smokejumpers helped with telephone lines that ran to fire lookouts in the area. He also described how and where they lived and what they ate when they went out "on project." He also talked about clearing brush and rocks from trails and airstrips in the forest.

500 **END OF TAPE ONE**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 [No introduction.] Crosby mentioned building a radio relay station made from cinder blocks near Elk Mountain. He said that project was hard work, because of the altitude. He talked about projects he worked on during his time at Silver City, New Mexico, including building heliports. He said that working in Silver City was good, because they constantly worked on fires or projects.

050 Crosby described a specific project work near the McCall base. He mentioned specifically building an outhouse near Boulder Mountain. Crosby wondered why the Forest service wanted an outhouse in such a remote area.

070 His training in smokejumping, in both fighting fire and non-fire projects, really aided Crosby in later life. He said the best thing was the confidence that smokejumping gave him. He talked about how his accent and his background helped other smokejumpers to label him as a "Dumb Okie."

Crosby said that he did not feel that way, although he sometimes played up being a “Dumb Okie.”

110 Crosby furnished his opinions about airborne training and smokejumping training. His Forest service smokejumping training, according to Crosby, gave him a great opportunity for individual thinking or decision making. In the Army everything was done as a group. He detailed what a paratrooper wore when he jumped from the plane; they carried much more equipment than a smokejumper.

195 Crosby said he received high quality training in both airborne and smokejumping. He continued to describe the differences between paratroopers and smokejumpers.

240 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Beasley, Ray
Boulder Mountain (Idaho)
Brown, Charlie
Catlin, Del
Chamberlain Basin (Idaho)
Cuddy Mountain (Idaho)
Elk Mountain (Idaho)
Fogg, Bob
Foresters' Club (McCall, Idaho)
Gila National Forest (New Mexico)
Graham, Dick
Hensall, Dick
Indian Creek (Idaho)
Ironside Mountain (eastern Oregon)
McCall, Idaho
Missoula, Montana
Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State University)
Rosselli, Carl
Silver City, New Mexico
Stadium Theater (McCall, Idaho)
Stergill Peak (Idaho)
Stover, James "Smoky"
Tate, Stan
United States Forest Service
Yensen, Bill

NARRATOR: Crosby, H. Gene

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: December 20, 2000

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter

Summary

000	Introduction.
010	Crosby spent a summer in the 1950s working in northern Idaho on a Blister Rust program. He explained why he took that summer job.
035	Crosby detailed how he worked to halt blister rust in the forest s in northern Idaho. He also mentioned some extracurricular activities that these summer employees did in the evenings and weekends.
105	During that summer Crosby used his skill in cutting timber to drop a large, dead tree right near their camp to use for firewood. Crosby also mentioned the copious amounts of food during that summer in the forest .
155	Crosby had mentioned in a previous interview that he wanted to fly. He explained why he had an interest in flying. He talked about growing up during the Depression in Oklahoma and about watching planes fly overhead from the various military bases in the area. Crosby and other kids in Oklahoma built model airplanes during school. All these factors led to his interest in flying.
215	During his early years in Oklahoma, Crosby along with other friends built a radio. They listened to the news of World War II with great, nervous excitement. He said that people on the home front fought the war hard.
250	During his time in the military, Crosby learned to fly at an airport near a base where he was stationed. He also continued flying lessons in Provo, Utah. He mentioned the various jobs he had as a pilot, including flying for Albertson's Inc.
295	Crosby received two degrees in agriculture. He explained why he took agricultural classes in college. He tried engineering in college, but he could not handle the math.
320	From the time they heard the fire buzzer until they returned to base camp, smokejumpers followed certain protocols. Crosby recalled what he would do during a fire jump.

450 Crosby, while talking about fire jumps, discussed one specific jump where he broke his foot. He fought the fire while sitting with help from his fellow jumper, Bill Yensen.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 Crosby concluded his story about the jump when he broke his leg. He continued to talk about what happened on a fire jump.

020 When Crosby jumped on fires, most jumpers packed out themselves and equipment, usually with the help of mules and a packer(a pack string). He talked about two particular pack outs.

055 Crosby explained what smokejumpers did when they returned to base camp after fighting a fire. He focused on the food that jumpers brought to a fire. He explained the differences in fighting fire in New Mexico and Idaho. Crosby said the equipment was the first priority; food was second.

120 Crosby described the various buildings at the McCall camp when he served as a smokejumper. He mentioned that some buildings were former CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) buildings. He explained that people from Texas and Oklahoma ate every meal as much as they could, because they all had a Depression mindset.

195 McCall really gave Crosby a great first impression, in terms of the smell of evergreens. He continued to describe McCall, particularly the set up of the town and the places smokejumpers would congregate. He felt it was a nice, little town in the 1950s and 1960s.

235 With prompting from the interviewer, Crosby talked about the gambling places in McCall and about his ambivalence towards gambling. He also talked about his parachutes jumps, both in the Forest service and in the military.

275 Crosby described a particular fire jump in Hells Canyon. That jump led to his first helicopter ride.

325 Crosby explained the concept of a burning period and the way smokejumpers battled a blaze based on this idea. He talked about the danger of fighting a fire at night. He also talked about how fires were fought, particularly during the heat of the day (burning period).

470 People have said that smokejumpers work hard and play hard. Crosby began to talk about the extracurricular activities of smokejumpers.

500 **END OF SIDE TWO**
 TAPE TWO SIDE ONE

000 [No introduction.] Crosby spent his spare time during fire season at the McCall airport, working on his flying. He also spent time “where the action” was, meaning drinking, cruising, looking for girls.

025 In 1959 Crosby spent his last summer as a smokejumper. He explained why he stopped smokejumping and what job he took with the forest service that following winter. Events conspired to push him into flying as a career.

050 After a few years away from the forest service, Crosby, while working for Johnson Flying Service, flew smokejumpers in the 1960s. Crosby enjoyed flying the smokejumpers in the summer.

075 Crosby briefly mentioned a flight that killed a pilot and a smokejumper in the 1960s. He continued to talk about backcountry flying. With prompting from the interviewer, Crosby discussed a book by a fellow smokejumper, Stan Tate, entitled *Jumping Skyward*.

110 Crosby discussed what protocols pilots would follow when they flew smokejumpers to a fire. He explained some difficulties in flying jumpers in the forest s.

300 The relationship between the smokejumpers and pilots was different for Crosby, because he was a former jumper. He knew what he could do both a pilot and as a former jumper.

335 By the middle of the 1960s, the company Crosby worked for lost the contract to fly the smokejumpers. Crosby discussed the problems with the planes that Crosby flew for Johnson Flying Service. Around that time Albertson’s Inc. offered him a job, and he took the job with them.

405 **END OF SIDE ONE**
 END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Albertson's Incorporated
Big Creek (Idaho)
Cedar City, Utah
Chamberlain Basin (Idaho)
Cole Meadows (Idaho)
Gila National Forest (New Mexico)
Granite Mountain (Idaho)
Hells Canyon
Johnson Flying Service
Jumping Skyward (Stan Tate's novel about smokejumping)
Kaniksu (sic?) National Forest
Lewis, "Tex"
McCall, Idaho
Payette National Forest
Priest Lake, Idaho
Provo, Utah
Salmon River
Shawnee, Oklahoma
Shell Rock Peak, Idaho
Shore Lodge, The (McCall, Idaho)
Stadium Club (McCall, Idaho)
Stibnite, Idaho
Tate, Stan
Tinker AFB (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma)
United States Forest Service
Webb, Wayne
Yensen, Bill

NARRATOR: Crosby, H. Gene

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: January 25, 2001

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Crosby began by talking about books written about the Johnson Flying Service before the interviewer's introduction.
015	Crosby detailed the protocols involved in backcountry flying. He talked about the problems that pilots can face in the backcountry during the entire year, including winter flying and near fatal flights. He also mentioned a few people who live and lived in Idaho's remote regions.
135	In a book, <i>Flying the Biggest Piece Back</i> , the book's author used a picture of a plane Crosby made an emergency landing with on a road and then skidded onto the riverbank. He described how the plane ended upside down on the riverbank, how he escaped from the plane, and how he returned to McCall. He also continued to discuss backcountry flying, particularly the types of loads that his company might ferry to locations in the backcountry.
305	With prompting from the interviewer, Crosby talked about how smokejumping helped to prepare him for backcountry flying, particularly for flying smokejumpers to a fire. He also described how accidents occurred in the backcountry. Crosby opined that most accidents and deaths resulted from pilots flying in the backcountry without the proper training. He also mentioned some difficult backcountry airstrips and some aspects of flying, such as a false horizon, that pilots need to know or experience to become better at their job or hobby. He talked about how your eyes can deceive you, particular in the backcountry when people are not accustomed to mountainous terrain.
490	END OF SIDE ONE TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
000	Crosby briefly mentioned the beauty of backcountry scenery. He then described the differences between landing with wheels and landing with skis. During the winter backcountry pilots used skis on their planes to land the vehicle. He also mentioned two particular winter flights into the backcountry, one when he dug out the plane, because it became stuck in the snow, and the other when a storm forced him to land and spend the evening in a backcountry ranch.

- 130 Although smokejumpers did have friendly rivalries, backcountry pilots, according to Crosby, did not, for the most part, have competitions or rivalries. He felt the job, flying people and cargo in the mountains, was too important and dangerous to worry about competing against other pilots.
- 170 Crosby offered his opinions on female backcountry pilots and female smokejumpers. He mentioned one female pilot and smokejumper, in particular.
- 210 With prompting from the interviewer, Crosby recalled why he left Johnson Flying Service and how he got a job as a corporate pilot for Albertson's Inc. He wanted to stay and flying in the backcountry, but he thought his future employment with Johnson's would not allow it. He said corporate flying "could be a dog's life."
- 320 Crosby, through flying for Albertson's, flew Joe Albertson, J.L. Scott, and Warren McCain. He felt that these men made the pilots feel "like one of the guys." Crosby felt Joe Albertson was as great as his reputation.
- 345 After being laid off by Albertson's, Crosby became a farmer on land near Notus, Idaho, he had bought before losing his job. He talked about farming and raising cattle. An agricultural depression in the 1980s and his divorce basically caused him to lose his farm.
- 400 Crosby mentioned one of his daughters who worked, at the time, at a large newspaper in New Hampshire. The discussion about his daughter led Crosby to discuss the strong work ethic that farm work instilled in his children and to discuss the value of education in a small school district.
- 470 In his later life, Crosby joined a parachute club near Star, Idaho. He talked about why he joined this club and about how hosted large parties at his ranch.
- 500 **END OF TAPE ONE**
TAPE TWO SIDE ONE
- 000 Introduction.
- 005 Crosby continued to describe the specifics about the parties he and a friend hosted at Crosby's farm. He also continued to talk about his parachute jumps at Star.
- 065 Crosby said that he never locked his house on the farm. He mentioned that people involved in an alleged drug ring did rob him on a couple of

occasions. He also talked about how local kids would play basketball on a court on the farm and never caused any trouble.

095 Crosby said he always felt good jumping out of airplane, but the landings when he was older were harder on his body.

110 Crosby liked to use the phrase, "Life in the Parking Lane." He explained the meaning of this phrase and the challenges, both physical and occupational, in growing older. He also mentioned some benefits with his age, particularly writing.

145 With prompting from the interviewer, Crosby talked about some of his writings, specifically a story about his take on Santa Claus. He talked about the positive response he received when he read part of the story at a workshop in McCall. He has worked on this story for nearly ten years, and he hopes that someone will publish it, eventually.

275 Crosby continued to talk about his writing, including a commercial he pitched to two national beverage companies. One of the companies quashed the idea, because of copyright problems.

300 Crosby described how he became interested in writing. He talked about where he got ideas for his stories. **[Note: Approximately 50 seconds of tape erased per narrator's request.]** He returned to talking about his Santa Claus story, especially the difficulty of getting some manuscript into Hollywood producers' or publishers' hands.

405 Crosby offered his memories of some smokejumpers he knew who worked for companies, bankrolled by the CIA in Southeast Asia. He said that people eventually found out that these people worked in Southeast Asia. He applied to work as a pilot, but he never got a job with these companies.

480 Crosby gave advice to the younger generation about growing older. He said he felt quite happy about certain aspects of his life today.

500 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE TWO SIDE TWO

000 The best advice he could give to the younger generation is try to find a compatible companion or to have a happy marriage.

020 Crosby said that he would not change any of the years spent smokejumping or flying in the backcountry.

030 **END OF SIDE TWO**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Albertson, J.A. "Joe"
Albertson's Incorporation
Big Creek (Idaho)
Cabin Creek (Idaho)
Chamberlain Basin (Idaho)
Clark, Lynn
Cole Meadows (Idaho)
Honecker [?], Maurice
Johnson Flying Service
Mackay Bar (Idaho)
McCall, Idaho
Messenger, Laurie
Notus, Idaho
Soldier Bar (Idaho)
Star, Idaho
Taylor Ranch (Idaho)
Tice, Al
United States Forest Service
Warren, Idaho